

188491



Virginia Pilot Association

TELEPHONE : 757-486-0008
FACSIMILE : 757-486-9384
email: dlapatch@vapilotoon.com

3329 SHORE DRIVE
VIRGINIA BEACH, VA 2345

To: Docket Management Facility
U.S. Department of Transportation
Room Pl 401
Washington D. C. 20590-0001

USCG-2002-12876-2

Ref: Port Access Route Study of the Chesapeake Bay Entrance
Request for comments, Federal Register, Vol. 67, No. 144 of July 26, 2002

DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
02 SEP 19 PM 3:59

September 16, 2002

Dear Sir,

The Virginia Pilot Association is pleased to submit the following comments in response to the above mentioned PARS.

Northeast Approach

The northeast inbound sealane has shoaled to 28' MLW. The outbound lane has shoaled to 33' MLW. This channel should be maintained to 35' MLW. The channel may be redirected further south to avoid Nautilus Shoal and be placed in such a position that would offer 35' depths without dredging.

Chesapeake Light Tower


Chesapeake Light Tower should be maintained for several reasons. It is an early visual reference for inbound traffic and is important for safe navigation. In addition, it provides a platform for critical real-time weather data and has potential for security control issues in the future.

Southeastern approach

A complete review of the southeastern approach may need to be made for the following reasons. With the exception of U.S. Naval vessels, the channel has been primarily used by outbound coal ships. However, the export coal market in the United States has dropped by nearly 80% over the past four years and is not anticipated to rebound in the near future. Consequently, the gated channel (buoys 1 and 2 to 15 and 16) is seldom used by commercial vessels. All inbound and outbound traffic actually transits outside the gated channel. Thus, the deepest water is not being utilized by the majority of vessels, and in fact, diverts inbound vessels closer to the northern shoals off buoys 9 and 10.

With the larger class of container vessels projected to transit the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay in the future, consideration should be given to the safest channel configuration for two way traffic. It may be time to consider placing buoys one mile apart down the centerline of the channel and doing away with the gated channel.

Sincerely,


J. William Cofer
President